SPIRITUALIZED

JASON PIERCE - vocals/guitar
KATE RADLEY - keyboards
SEAN COOK - bass

Jason Pierce's songwriting genius first came to acclaim with Spacemen 3, the late'80s British trance-rockers. Spacemen 3 trailblazed an approach that's now endemic in alternative music - 'record collection rock.' Spacemen 3 wore their influences on their sleeves, made no secret of their debt to the gods of underground rock - The Stooges, The Velvets, Suicide, MC5.

"In Spacemen 3, we'd often steal riffs," says Jason. "Like, 'Revolution' was basically MC5's 'Back to Comm.' Obscure stuff, but still outright borrowing. That gets a bit tired after a while, though. With Spiritualized, it's more like I'm trying to create music that fills the gaps in between all my influences, the gaps in my record collection. I'm trying to make the connections people have missed. It's very easy to sound like the Beatles or Beach Boys, but that doesn't make for great music. It makes for records that appear superficially 'great.' "

With Spiritualized, Jason has transcended such gilt-by-association. There's a lot of learning, a lot of listening, behind Spiritualized's sound - Kraftwerk, Brian Wilson, Spector, Electric Prunes, doo wop, gospel, to name only the most obvious - but Pierce's influences have undergone a process of osmosis, and emerged as a divine nectar unique to Spiritualized. Or (switching from botany to metallurgy for metaphors), Spiritualized's music is an amalgam. Pierce's pet sounds melted down in a crucible, *alchemized*. Whereas so many record-collection-rockers today simply take their influences and "hammer all the bits together into a mosaic," as Jason puts it.

If there's continuity between Jason's work with Spacemen 3 and with Spiritualized, it's the love of repetition. Spiritualized follow the minimal-is-maximal method: simple motifs are repeated, then layered and interwoven densely to create a shimmering, mesmerizing tapestry of sound. As such, Spiritualized are the missing link between underground rock's mantra tradition (Velvets, Nitzer Ebb) and the avant-garde drone minimalism (La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Michael Nyman). In fact, the new album **Pure Phase** sees Pierce calling on the services of the Balenescu Quartet (the string section used by Nyman in his systems music).

Spiritualized are the latest in that glorious lineage of rock bands who take avant-garde ideas and make them into gorgeous pop, e.g. Velvet Underground fusing John Cage and Phil Spector into the Wall of Noise, or the Byrds drawing from the idea of John Coltrane and Indian raga for "Eight Miles High." "I think it's incredibly easy to be an avant-garde band, and not so easy to turn it into pop that moves people emotionally and means something to them," says Jason.

Another carry-on from Jason's work with Spacemen 3 (particularly the last two albums **Playing With Fire** and **Recurring**) is Spirituality (Why'dya think they're called Spiritualized?). With its hymnal melodies, lyrical imagery of redemption and salvation, and Jason's devotional, beseeching vocals, the 1992 debut album **Lazer Guided Melodies** offered a kind of ambient gospel. Jason often sings from a position of fragility and aching incompleteness. In his songs, he seems to be searching for something to

make him whole, heal him, sanctify his soul. Spacemen 3 called that 'something' *'The Perfect Prescription.'* Spiritualized call it *'Medication.'* That magic potion which abolishes anxiety and doubt, that healing balm for the wounded soul, it could be God, it could be love, it could be drugs.

"Or it could be the music itself," offers Jason. "All the things that you most enjoy," he continues, "all the things that get you high, are the things that fuck you up the most. All the best things in life make you sick. Lovesick is about the sickest you'll ever feel."

And just as Jason's lyrics are always looking for transcendence, so Spiritualized's sound is always soaring, reaching out and up to heaven. One song on the new album, "Spread Your Wings," recalls the legend of Icarus, who built wings for himself and tried in vain to fly to the sun.

" 'Spread Your Wings' swings both ways," explains Jason. "It's about rising above it all and being sucked down into lethargy. This car plowed down two people right in front of us, and for a while I vacillated between two responses: on the one hand, 'life's so short, so let's get on with it and enjoy it,' on the other, feeling 'what's the point, you could get mowed down tomorrow without even knowing about it.' "

One of Spiritualized's secrets, and what helps make their music so levitational, is Pierce's heretical idea about production - specifically, his belief that drums should be low in the mix, a muted presence. This is totally at odds with the tyrannical trend in modern music to intensify the beat, but, a notorious perfectionist, he is obsessed with the minutiae of arrangement and production, and ambitious in all the ways that count (i.e. aesthetic rather than financial).

"For us it's all about striving to make an 'Electric Ladyland' every time you do a record, about trying to make a $15,000 record sound like it cost half a million. We want to make that standard of album, and then rise to the challenge of doing it live, rearranging the music, trying to get an even higher high."

So what about Spiritualized? Jason says they're really just a "rock 'n' roll band," although he sometimes wonders if that's compatible with taking a string section on tour. In the past he's classified their music as 'soul.' And as "These Blues" on the new album testifies, he also feels "we're a blues band as well." In the end, Spiritualized is simply great music; music that's fluent in what Van Morrison called "the inarticulate speech of the heart," music that effortlessly dissolves any category with which you try to frame it.

"A lot of people tell me, 'oh your records really move me, they make me cry," says Jason. "But with **Pure Phase** I genuinely tried to make a record that's so beautiful it brings a tear to your eye."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Singles	*Albums*
1990 Anyway That You Want Me	
1991 Feel So Sad	
1991 Run / I Want You	
1992 Medication	1992 Lazer Guided Melodies
1993 Electric Mainline	
1995 Let It Flow	1995 Pure Phase

Details

April 1995 Details

Spiritualized

Pure Phase (Dedicated/Arista) As a member of the U.K.'s notorious trance-noise rockers Spacemen 3, Jason Pierce was famous for sitting down onstage and plucking at his bass as if he were terrified it would bite him. As the main man behind Spiritualized, Pierce has relaxed into a calmer groove of his own, a blissfully drowsy swirl of mantra-like drones and placid melodies. Spiritualized's second album, *Pure Phase,* does for punk rock what Portishead does for dance, mixing up the ingredients until they flow together as hushed, languid mood music, perfect for long baths. Pierce's guitar ranges from feedback wails to plaintive acoustic strumming, submerged in a blur of keyboards, sitars, harmonicas, buzzing electronic gadgets, and every other noise-maker the group could find lying around the apartment. Vocals and drums are treated as just another sound effect echoing through the mix, and the results are hazy enough to make the Cranberries sound like speed metal. The most energetic song on *Pure Phase* is the one that begins "Every day I wake up / And take my medication," but each track generates its own gauzy vibe. "Electric Mainline" summons the roar of a spaceship taking off, while "The Slide Song" sounds like Darth Vader trying to sing the blues. "Lay Back in the Sun" and "Good Times" combine in a magnificent medley, warping a barrelhouse piano riff while Pierce sings about the pleasures of sunlight as if he'd just stepped outside after a week in the basement.

Contributing editor Rob Sheffield no longer has any Greek letters in his name.

Billboard
FEBRUARY 18, 1995
Artists & Music

U.K.'s Spiritualized Get 'Pure' For 2nd Set

Arista Album Explores Heady Single-Tone Minimalism

■ BY DAVID SPRAGUE

NEW YORK—Jason Pierce, front man of British trance-rock Spiritualized, thinks of his band in terms of cross-sensory stimulation. That idea has permeated the offices of Dedicated/Arista, which will release the band's second album, "Pure Phase," March 28.

"All of our efforts address the fact that this is a very visually oriented, extremely intellectually compelling band," says Tom Ennis, Arista VP of product management. "We're using that to our advantage from day one, shipping press and radio an interactive press kit that uses sound samples and graphics."

Arista will extend that approach to retail, where it will use a limited edition "glow-box" CD package that highlights the striking artwork on the cover of "Pure Phase." "We'll be using it to create a profile in places where the band is a bit less known," says Arista manager of artist development Bill Wilson. "But we'll be importing enough to sell at a consumer-friendly price."

The label is counting on Spiritualized to maintain a strong touring presence for the first time in several years (a 1992 tour with the Jesus & Mary Chain generated exceedingly positive reviews). Ennis says a short, late-spring trek is booked already, and negotiations are underway to have Spiritualized headline Lollapalooza's second stage.

"I've always thought of us as a live band first," says Pierce. "It's not a huge, technical project: We don't use much more than two old keyboards and two old amplifiers. But I find that we make sounds that seem like more than the sum of the parts, something that you feel in your spine."

Pierce fronted the seminal drone-rock band Spacemen 3—which also has spawned the bands Spectrum and the Darkside. Spacemen 3 released several late '80s albums that embodied its frequently employed, self-applied slogan, "taking drugs to make music to take drugs to," a notion Pierce has modified, while not disassociating himself from it entirely.

SPIRITUALIZED: Jason Pierce, Sean Cook, and Kate Radley.

"Any mood alteration should come through the music rather than substances," he says. "Substances can be a tonic: If you use them, fine, but you certainly don't need them to feel what we do."

While terms like "psychedelic" have been bandied about to describe Spiritualized, the band's sound is more slippery than that. Pierce cites influences as diverse as minimalist composer LaMonte Young and the Beach Boys. If one can envision a middle ground between those two acts, it might sound something like the gossamer shimmers that make up "Pure Phase."

"There's not a lot of melody involved in what we're doing: It doesn't rely on normal musical ideas like middle eights or bridges or choruses," says Pierce. " 'Pure Phase' is as minimal as you can get: It's essentially a single tone. We wanted to boil it down to the idea of one person playing one note beautifully."

That assessment aside, Arista's Wilson feels that "Pure Phase" will expand upon Spiritualized's stateside fan base—estimated to be in the 10,000 range, judging by sales of its 1992 debut "Lazer Guided Melodies."

"There are a large number of people who buy every piece of music that comes out [by] Spiritualized," says Wilson. "Although they only sold about 10,000 copies last time out, they have built an awareness, especially at press and college radio."

Wilson says the label will promote "Pure Phase" to college stations first and will take a track—probably "Let It Flow"—to commercial alternative outlets shortly thereafter. "As a format, commercial alternative is getting more adventurous," he says. "This is an ideal time for a record that sounds this unique."

While Pierce says Spiritualized's aesthetic obliqueness may lose the casual listener, he insists that, in the end, his band is carrying on the spirit of rock'n'roll, not creating high art.

"A lot of people who work with minimal music get very highbrow," he says. "It's easy to hide behind being avant-garde, easy to tell people they're not intelligent enough to understand what you do. That's not what we're about. We aim to make people feel things on a more basic, more soulful level."

REQUEST
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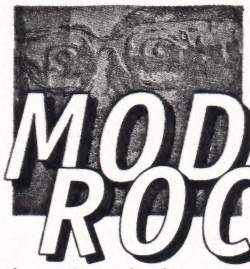


MODERN ROCK

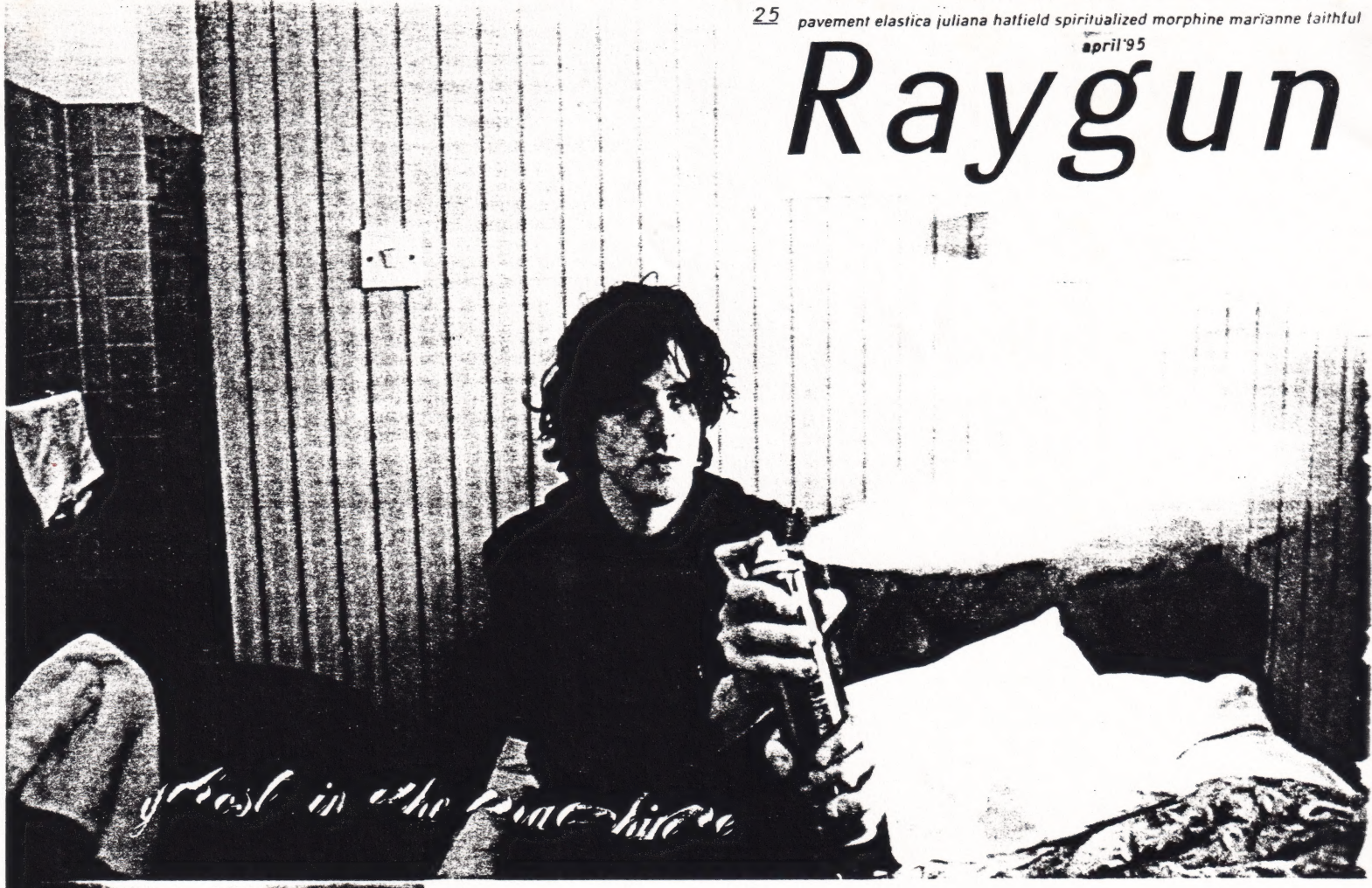
BY JIM DeROGATIS

It took three years, but SPIRITUALIZED has released a follow-up album every bit as good as its debut. On *Pure Phase* (Dedicated/RCA), guitarist/vocalist Jason Pierce combines touches of gospel, the classical minimalism of Steve Reich and Terry Riley, and the swirling guitar rock of his former band, Spacemen 3. The result is lazy melodic jams like "Medication" and "Electric Mainline," which have a transcendent power that lies somewhere between a religious revival meeting and a really good acid trip.

SPIRITUALIZED CREATES MELODIC JAMS EQUAL IN POWER TO A RELIGIOUS REVIVIAL MEETING OR A GOOD ACID TRIP.

april '95

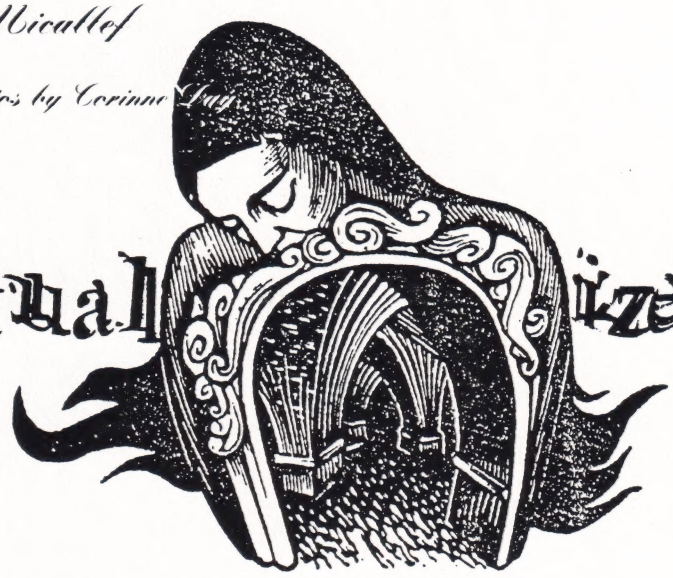
Raygun



by Ken Micallef

photos by Corinne Day

spiritualized



1 With his spindly limbs curled around him like the protective shell of a snail, Jason Pierce sits unmoving, at the head of his hotel room bed. [2]Swathed in jeans and a Levi jacket, he is a skeletal, yellow-faced figure. [3]A mop of tangled brown hair partially obscures his baggy, blue, hollowed-out eyes, giving him the look of an unhealthy sheepdog who hasn't slept for days. [4]When a visitor enters the room, Pierce acknowledges him with an imperceptible turn of his head, then cooly blows a stream of cigarette smoke through an open window into the damp midday London air. [5]The floor is covered with empty bags and clothes, as well as tea cups, a CD boom box and a half-eaten Kelloggs' variety six-pack. [6]Kate Radley and Sean Cook quietly discuss an order for drinks, but the gauntly handsome Pierce dominates the room with an attitude of resplendent lethargy.

2 But to view this complacent scene as metaphor to a lax mindset would be a mistake. [2]Spiritualized are reknowned for mumbling their way through interviews, but they'd rather just save their music for the music. [3]Holed up in the vast Columbia hotel while rehearsing for an upcoming tour, Spiritualized appear as three stoned savants with no hint of the transcendant grace that fills their records[a] and levitates their live shows. [4]In concert, they seem to practice some Zen-like control of energy, making their music build, wave upon mushrooming wave, as they stand motionless, working their instruments. [5]In the smaller-than-life confines of a hotel room, however, they're simply bored and listless, waiting for nightfall.

3 Labeled everything from 21st-Century Gospel to Record Collection Rock, Spiritualized have in a wall-of-bombast approach of Sixties visionary Phil Spector. [2]Characteristically, Pierce was ques-Jason Pierce a man with an undeniably unique vision, able to amalgamate threads of inspiration into otion forms as early as Spacemen 3, searching the past for something to rattle his perceptions. an original and mesmerizing whole. [2]A founder of the original drug-trance-experimentalist movement with Spacemen 3, Pierce's prescience combines gospel fervor with Kraftwerk-like minimalism; Stax-inspired blow-outs with the orchestral beauty of Brian Wilson and hymnal melodies with quaking, orgiastic rhythms, all presented with a lyrical ethos that successfully mirrors[b] transcendence through the opiates of love, drugs and religion. [3]Sound like a mouthful? [4]Pierce is typically shortwinded:

4 "Our goal is always the same,"
—he whispers in regard to their newest release, *Pure Phase*,
"to make a record that is the best that we can possibly make
at that time.
[2]We're not doing this for the money or the charts
or for the amount of people who will buy the record.
[3]That's not our idea of success."

5 *Pure Phase* is an amazingly lush cohesion. [2]From the drugged-out beauty of "Let It Flow" to the sun-drenched enthusiasm of "Lay Back In The Sun"[c] to the soul swagger of the Delaney and Bonnie-esque "Good Times" to the backwards noise and feedback of "Electric Phase," the album rides from peak to peak, connected by swirling keyboard tones in a sea of reverberating production.

6 "We knew what we wanted to do with this album a bit more,"
—says Pierce.
[2]"We know how to make sounds that worked.
We set about refining some of the ideas
that began on *Lazer Guided Melodies*."

7 Originally completed in the spring of '94, *Pure Phase* was mixed, then remixed after Pierce's perfectionist tendencies took hold. [2]The aural result is two complete mixes running simultaneously in stereo. [3]Unprecedented as a production technique and characteristically over the top, the majestic, dual-stereo sound on *Pure Phase* is the work of a driven musician using the studio as yet another instrument to fulfill his fantasy.

8 "I don't think that's ever been done before
or likely to be done again."
—says Pierce, aka producer J. Spaceman.
[2]"It was pretty difficult to synchronize the songs
so our engineer chopped them into four-bar sections.
[3]If you play both of the mixes together,
they drift by the end of the tracks
so he cut them into sections
so it would make sense.
[4]He's a very patient man."

9 Calling themselves "really just a rock 'n' roll band," Spiritualized record in spontaneous, one-take fashion, then treat the music with a minimum of effects, with a surprising cost-consciousness

10 Pierce's admission is startling when you consider the depth of sound contained in *Pure* and seeks. [2]In addition to the Balenescu String Quarter[e], Pierce enlisted three vocalists, a second gui-'Good Dope, Good Gun' tarist, percussion, banjo, violin, trombone, trumpet and saxophone[f] and a drummer who has since Pure Phase cost $22,000. been replaced by Reese of Echo and The Bunnymen. [3]With Pierce's croaky vocals sheathed in heav-who've worked with systems music maestro Michael Nyman, as well as releasing an album of Kraftwerk covers ily drones and nasal dissonances, the music simply buzzes with life, Pierce claiming to use played by Rico, Tam Tam and Bammie, respectively "the same effects as everyone else,"
—your common phase shifters, fuzz boxes and tremolo bars.

11 This atmospheric soundscape buries the drums in gauze while detailing a humorous trombone or delicate flute, recalling both the gentleness of *Pet Sounds*-era Brian Wilson and the echoey as the viola on "All Of My Tears."

12 "Musicians don't experiment anymore,"
—he says.
[2]"There's this norm that too many bands use
where the bass and the bass drum
is mixed right down the center.
[3]It all sounds the same.
[4]I like the way people used to mess around in the Sixties.
[5]The drummer would be in one side of the mix,
maybe the piano in the other side.
[6]Now everything is polished production.

13 "We try different ways of producing music,"
—he continues.
[2]"When the drums are low in the mix,
it makes the notes more powerful.
[3]The drums act as an anchor,
and if you're trying to make music
that soars and reaches phenomenal peaks,
then the drums have to be treated in a special way.
[4]On *Lazer Guided Melodies*,
the drums were the last thing to go down
and he only got a couple tracks...what was his name?
—[Pierce forgets names as quickly as
the color of yesterday's socks]."

14 And Pierce regards the minimalist approach of *Pure Phase* as a paring down of instrumentation as opposed to the layering of *LGM*, but he disputes obvious inferences in his music—
[2]"On *LGM* we layered up loads of sounds to get the desired effect,
but on *Pure Phase* we'd rather hear
one person playing a single sound beautifully
instead of throwing in a lot of stuff
to get the same effect.
[3]Phil Spector was about having six guitars and vocals,
this definitely wasn't that approach."

15 Pierce/Spaceman admits to a Brian Wilson connection but not in the blatant fashion that sweetens records by artists such as World Party, where the Sixties turn into a plastic eyesore of Lenny Kravitz proportions.
[2]"That whole Beach Boys thing
came into vogue a couple years ago,
but most people were just using the key things
without making it their own.
[3]We use some of those ideas
but without trying to make an album that competes with *Pet Sounds*
or is somehow the same as that."

[a] 1992's *Lazer Guided Melodies*, the mail order-only *Fucked Up Inside* and several singles
[b] and seeks.
[c] 'Good Dope, Good Gun'
[d] Pure Phase cost $22,000.
[e] who've worked with systems music maestro Michael Nyman, as well as releasing an album of Kraftwerk covers
[f] played by Rico, Tam Tam and Bammie, respectively
[g] as the viola on "All Of My Tears."

16 Fittingly, Pierce denounces the current trend of musicians reverential of the past who simply rehash Zeppelin or Hendrix or the Velvet Underground or the Stooges.

[2]"The weird thing is that many bands
aren't taking influences or pieces of other people's music
and then throwing a whole load of themselves into it,"
—he observes.

[3]"They're just making these mosaics,
nailing bits of other people's songs together.
[4]We're into a lot of stuff
but I don't think the influences are obvious
and we never lift riffs or do anything that blatant.
[5]What kind of gratification can you get by doing that?"

17 The BBC studios in the London suburb of Maida Vaile are part of a sprawling Victorian complex that stretches underground for three miles. [2]The ghosts of the Beatles and Bing Crosby haunt the medicinally clean hallways as opera and big band music stream out of various rooms. [3]Spiritualized are here today to record a Peel Session for BBC's *Radio One*.

18 Jason Pierce walks in[a] to studio B4, followed by the statuesque Kate Radley, the two of them jovial and chatty, a far cry from the previous day's interview. [2]As Jason shows everyone the glow-in-the-dark jewel box for *Pure Phase*[a], bassist Sean Cook plops into a chair, warming up his wah-monica.

19 After a round of tea, Spiritualized, complete with a second guitarist and violin player, launch into "Take Your Time," a song from the *Let It Flow*[b] EP[c] that sounds like Lou Reed meeting Waylon Jennings in an Okie bar. [2]Kate plays the simple keyboard pattern, a tambourine falls in, Jason sings in a monotone.

20 The song is pedestrian at first, almost innocuous, creeping in intensity. [2]Imperceptibly, the music swells, elevates, levitates, fibrillates: it fills the room, blasting through the monitor speakers in the control booth. [3]The engineer, a proper-looking fellow in his late forties, exclaims—

[4]"Good Lord!
A band that can play!"

21 Back in the studio, Kate Radley rocks in motion to the now-voluminous cadence while Sean Cook swings from side-to-side. [2]But Pierce still looks asleep, only his fingers picking and right foot tapping as he stares blindly into space. [3]The song nears the end, Kate holding a long note until Jason looks up to cue her finish.

22

"I think playing live is what we do best,
and if we knew
where that intensity was coming from,
it could get very contrived,
it would be like going through the motions."
—Pierce says of the force that impels the band.

[2]"We each know the individual parts that we're playing
yet sometimes we hit these phenomenal peaks
where no one is in control."

23 On 1992's Rollercoaster tour with Jesus and Mary Chain and Curve, Spiritualized regularly received the best reviews, their gospel-drenched epics turning the dreary air of a place like New York's Roseland ballroom into sanctified, sumptuous, soul-stirring event.

24

"We're really into performing."
—adds Pierce.

[2]"Many bands now are just miming to ADATA.[d]
[3]A lot of the Mary Chain show was sequenced,
and if they fucked up
they had to start the song over.
[4]We don't want to replicate what's on the album.
[5]Why go hear a band just play the album louder
with a lot of people standing around you?"

25 So from where does Pierce's vision emanate? Is he the man who seeks to reconcile his sins in "Walking With Jesus" and "Shine A Light" or the drug-addled junkie crying:

"All I wanted was a taste, just enough to make me sick"
—in "Let It Flow"[e]?

[2]A worshipper at the throne of gospel and Sam Cooke or a voodoo guitarist bent on being
"blinded by all the horrors that I see?"[f]
[3]Both, all, in fact: Drugs have played a role for Pierce, as has the Lord.

26

"There is a time in everybody's life
when they feel,
'Lord, help me out.'
[2]You don't have to believe in a Lord or a God
to feel that way,"
—he says.

[3]"I may not be able to articulate it here
and it may sound hollow,
like I'm just taking a few lines from gospel music
and that I don't really understand it, but I do.
[4]You can appeal to God for help
without it having massive religious connotations.
[5]'Oh, God' is often the only way to sum up those feelings.

27

"And as far as drugs go,
ya know, it works both ways.
[2]You're searching for a greater feeling but
without the use of drugs all the time.
[3]They can be a huge burden as well.
[4]We called ourselves Spiritualized
because we wanted to get that same high through music."

28 Pierce's admiration for Sam Cooke borders on the religious, and is a major key to what drives him.

[2]"A lot of gospel sounds effortless,
and yet the feeling they're putting across is so immense.
[3]Sam Cooke sounds like that to me,"
—he explains.

[4]"It was so effortless for him
to make such awe-inspiring sounds.
[5]We're after getting those emotive feelings
from the listener that all great music does.
[6]Music like Sam Cooke's is beyond
the aural or brain thing,
it's more of a spinal connection.
[7]It affects your whole body.
[8]When you're listening to music that profound,
you can't speak,
it's overwhelming."

[a] wearing a Betty Ford Clinic T-shirt with "clean & serene" on the back, embossed with sun god motif and the moniker "Spiritualized Electric Mainline"
[b] live tracks from an exceptional performance in Glastonbury
[c] digital tape
[d] from "Smile."